

'Dogs get cuts for colon cancer

Senior Michalina Tomczak



Senior Kasey Gassensmith



Submitted photos

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Senior center Michalina Tomczak and senior guard Kasey Gassensmith shaved their heads to raise awareness about colon cancer April 10. Gassensmith donated her locks to Pantene Beautiful Lengths, and the two raised more than \$1,500 for Chris4Life Colon Cancer Foundation.

Colon cancer, also called colorectal cancer, is the third most common cancer in men and women, and also is the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the U.S., according to the American Cancer Society. Research by the American Cancer Society has shown that incidence and mortality rates of colorectal cancer are higher in African-Americans than in Caucasians.

The Chris4Life Colon Cancer Foundation is dedicated to finding a cure for colorectal cancer, according to the foundation's website. The website states until a cure is found, the Chris4Life Cancer Foundation is committed to improving the treatment experience for patients and caregivers and raising awareness about colon cancer.

Tomczak said she also is committed to raising awareness for the cause because colon cancer research is a very personal topic for her. Tomczak said her father was diagnosed with colon cancer in October 2012 and died from the disease April 22, 2013.

Tomczak said she always had considered shaving her head but gained the courage to do so following her father's death.

"There's many ways to keep them around, even when they're gone," Tomczak said. "You can still honor them and keep them in your life. They can still impact your life even if they aren't right there with you."

This was Tomczak's first time shaving her head, and she said it probably will be her last. Tomczak said Gassensmith's support, along with that of the Truman State community and her teammates, encouraged her to shave her head. Tomczak said in addition to moral support and encouragement, many people have helped with her efforts to raise money.

Tomczak also encouraged anyone considering

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shaving their head to do so.

"Hair is just hair," Tomczak said. "When I shaved it, I felt no different. I looked in the mirror and still saw myself. Nothing had changed. Hair is not essential to happiness. It will grow back, and it's not the end of the world. I'm more confident than I was

before. It increased my self-esteem. It's empowering and freeing."

Although Gassensmith does not have a personal connection to colon cancer, she said she shaved her head in support of Tomczak's cause. Gassensmith said because the disease was such a big part of Tomczak's life, she wanted to support Tomczak throughout the entire process.

Gassensmith said she feels great about donating her hair. She said this is not the first time she has donated her hair, but it is the first time she has completely shaved it. She said she always donates at least 10 inches and is proud to give what she can to the cause. Gassensmith said donating hair is a great way to raise awareness and also a way to stand with those who do not have any other choice but to shave their head.

Gassensmith said she hopes others besides herself and Tomczak will jump in and help by donating hair, contributing money or simply supporting those facing cancer.

Gassensmith said though shaving your head is a big change, donating your hair is a small sacrifice that helps many people.

"Your hair's going to grow back," Gassensmith said. "It's not a big deal. You have the chance to change someone's life. I think it's worth it."

Currently, the GoFundMe fundraiser Tomczak is sponsoring is still open for more donations. Gassensmith said Tomczak's goal was to raise \$1,000 — they have surpassed this goal, but both girls agreed that every dollar counts toward research efforts. People interested in donating can visit gofundme.com/ban3r2jg.

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